

Message Text

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FOLLOWING IS REPEAT SINGAPORE 1139, SENT SECSTATE, INFO
KUALA LUMPUR, BANGKOK, SONGKHLA, GENEVA, USUN, JAKARTA,
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TAGS: SREF, VS, MY, TH, CB, LA, SN

SUBJECT: WCRP REPORT ON "BOAT PEOPLE PROJECT"

1. SUMMARY. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED A REPORT AUTHORED BY
WCRP SEC GEN HOMER JACK ENTITLED "THE BOAT PEOPLE PROJECT
IN PERSPECTIVE," DATED MARCH 10, 1977, WHICH HAS ATTACH-
MENT "A STATEMENT OF PARTICULARS," DATED MARCH 2 AND
DESIGNATED "CONFIDENTIAL" BY JACK. THE REPORT WAS DIS-
TRIBUTED TO DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS OF REFUGEE ACCEPTING
COUNTRIES IN SINGAPORE AND TO RELIGIOUS AND CHARITABLE
ORGANIZATIONS WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO THE WCRP PROJECT. THE
"CONFIDENTIAL" STATEMENT WAS DISTRIBUTED LESS WIDELY, AND
NONE OF THE MATERIAL WAS RELEASED TO THE PRESS.
FULL TEXT IS REPORTED PARAS 3 AND 4 BELOW.

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2. JACK PLANS TO LEAVE FOR THE U.S. ON MARCH 24,
AND IS PREPARING AN IN-DEPTH REPORT ON THE WCRP
PROJECT WHICH WILL ALSO BE SENT TO GOVERNMENTS
AND CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS. THE PROJECT CHAIR-
MAN, PROFESSOR YOSHIKI IISAKA OF JAPAN, WAS SCHEDULED
TO ARRIVE IN SINGAPORE LAST NIGHT, MARCH 17, AND
WILL ASSUME DIRECTION UPON JACK'S DEPARTURE.

3. TEXT: " THE BOAT PEOPLE PROJECT IN PRESPECTIVE."
THE BOAT PEOPLE PROJECT WAS BEGUN AT THE ASIAN

CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE (ACRP), HELD AT SINGAPORE DURING THE LAST WEEK OF NOVEMBER 1976. SOME 300 PERSONS ATTENDED, REPRESENTING THE MAJOR WORLD RELIGIONS IN 17 COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND THE SOUTH PACIFIC. AFTER SOME LEADERS OF ACRP VISITED A GROUP OF BOAT PEOPLE ABOARD A FREIGHTER IN THE SINGAPORE HARBOR, THE CONFERENCE COMMISSION ON PEACE, SECURITY, AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN ASIA RECOMMENDED THAT ACRP LAUNCH THIS PROJECT. THE INTERNATIONAL BOARD OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE (WCRP), MEETING ALSO IN SINGAPORE, ENDORSED THIS ACTION OF ACRP TO BEGIN IMMEDIATELY A JOINT PROJECT "TO RESCUE THE REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA WHO ARE IN BOATS DRIFTING IN THE OPEN SEAS". THE PROJECT THUS HAD TWO PRINCIPAL PURPOSES: (1) TO CALL TO THE ATTENTION OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY THE CONTINUING PROBLEM OF THE BOAT PEOPLE, FROM THEIR PERILOUS EXODUS TO THEIR PERMANENT RESETTLEMENT, AND (2) TO PUT ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENTS AND THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR) TO RESETTLE THESE PEOPLE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. IT SHOULD ALSO BE INDICATED THAT THE PROJECT WAS NOT CREATED TO ENCOURAGE CITIZENS OF VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, OR LAOS TO LEAVE THEIR COUNTRY. ALSO THE PROJECT WAS NOT MEANT TO CONTINUE INDEFINITELY, BUT BE OF LIMITED DURATION, COVERING THE PERIOD OF THE 1976-77 MONSOON. DURING THE FOUR-MONTH DURATION OF THE PROJECT -- DECEMBER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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1976 THROUGH MARCH 1977 -- THE FOLLOWING OPERATIONS WERE CONDUCTED:

1) THE PROJECT SENT A SHIP FROM SINGAPORE IN DECEMBER TO ATTEMPT TO FIND BOAT PEOPLE ON THE HIGH SEAS. THE MONSOON WAS IN FULL FORCE BY THEN, AND AN AIRPLANE WAS ALSO CHARTERED TO SCOUT THE SEAS. SOME BOAT PEOPLE WERE LOCATED.

2) THE PROJECT SENT OUT TEAMS ON LAND TO TRY TO LOCATE BOAT PEOPLE STRANDED ON UNINHABITED ISLANDS OR OTHERWISE IN DISTRESS.

3) THE PROJECT SENT REPRESENTATIVES TO VISIT SOME OF THE BOAT PEOPLE CAMPS IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND TO ASCERTAIN HOW THE REFUGEES REACHED THERE FROM CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM AND TO VIEW THE CONDITIONS OF THE CAMPS.

4) THE PROJECT CHARTERED THE SHIP, "ROLAND", TO PICK UP BOAT PEOPLE FROM THE SEA AND ON UNINHABITED ISLANDS. SOME 302 REFUGEES ULTIMATELY CAME ABOARD. TWO HUNDRED WERE FROM TWO BOAT PEOPLE CAMPS. THEIR MOTIVATIONS FOR LEAVING THE CAMPS TO GO ABOARD ARE NOT YET COMPLETELY KNOWN. ATTEMPTS ARE CURRENTLY BEING MADE BY NINE WESTERN GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING AUSTRALIA,

AND UNDER THE UNHCR, TO IRELAND AND RESETTLE ALL PASSENGERS ON THE "ROLAND". ALREADY 15 HAVE GONE TO AUSTRIA AND THREE TO FRANCE.

5) THE PROJECT ALSO CHARTERED THE SHIP "LEAP DAL", TO PICK UP BOAT PEOPLE. SOME 254 REFUGEES CAME ON THIS BOAT, MANY UNDER QUESTIONABLE CIRCUMSTANCES. MOST WERE LAOTIANS FROM THAILAND. ATTEMPTS ARE NOW BEING MADE TO RETURN THESE PERSONS TO LAND AND ULTIMATELY RESETTLE THESE PERSONS.

6) THE PROJECT HAS NECESSARILY HAD TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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THE SOUTH-EAST ASIAN GOVERNMENTS OF TEMPORARY HAVEN -- ESPECIALLY SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA -- AND WITH THE NINE COUNTRIES OFFERING PERMANENT HOMES. ALSO IT HAS HAD TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE UNHCR, LOCAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE MALAYSIAN RED CRESCENT SOCIETY, AND THE INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION, SINGAPORE.

WHILE THE PROJECT FACED MANY OBSTACLES, AND COMMITTED SOME ADMINISTRATIVE ERRORS, AND WHILE IT IS TOO EARLY FOR ANY FINAL ASSESSMENT OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CERTAIN TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS CAN NOW BE MADE:

-- THE PROJECT HAS SENSITIZED WORLD PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE BOAT PEOPLE

-- THE PROJECT HAS ALSO HELPED WCRP AFFILIATES IN WESTERN COUNTRIES PROD THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO ACCEPT MORE BOAT PEOPLE FOR PERMANENT HOMES, AND MORE QUICKLY.

-- THE PROJECT, WHILE CREATING SOME NEEDLESS PROBLEMS, HAS ALSO STIMULATED THE MANY GOVERNMENTS AND AGENCIES INVOLVED TO ACCELERATE THE WHOLE PROCESS OF THE TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT SETTLEMENT OF BOAT PEOPLE.

THE COST OF THE PROJECT HAS BEEN LESS THAN THAT OF THE FIN OF AN INTER-CONTINENTAL MISSILE -SO FAR ABOUT U.S. \$200,000. CONTRIBUTIONS TO WHAT IS TECHNICALLY DESIGNATED AS THE INDO-CHINA REFUGEE RELIEF FUND OF WCRP/ACRP HAVE COME FROM RELIGIOUS GROUPS -- BUDDHIST, CHRISTIAN, HINDU, ISLAMIC, JEWISH, SHINTOIST, SIKH -- FROM JAPAN, SINGAPORE, EUROPE (WEST GERMANY, SWITZERLAND, AND THE NETHERLANDS), CANADA, AND THE U.S.A. PROFESSOR YOSHIKAKI IISAKA OF TOKYO IS CHAIRMAN OF THE PROJECT AND MR. WILLIE TAY KHIM SAN OF SINGAPORE IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TREASURER. OTHER MEMBERS OF THE BOARD ARE MR. MEHERVAN SINGH OF SINGAPORE, REPRESENTING THE INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION, SINGAPORE; REV. YASUYOSHI SAKATA OF TOKYO, REPRESENTING THE JAPANESE COMMITTEE OF WCRP; REV. YASU KATSUYAMA OF TOKYO, REPRESENTING THE ASIAN CONFERENCE OF RELIGION AND PEACE; AND DR. HOMER A. JACK OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTING THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE. DR. JACK WAS NAMED ACTING DIRECTOR ON FEBRUARY 18, 1977. THE PROJECT IS SPONSORED BY WCRP AND ITS ASIAN AFFILIATE, ACRP. WCRP IS AN INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH U.N. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL. FOUNDED IN 1970, WCRP HAS ADHERENTS IN 50 COUNTRIES, WITH INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK AND REGIONAL OFFICES IN BONN, NEW DELHI, OTTAWA, SINGAPORE, AND TOKYO.

4. TEXT: "A STATEMENT OF PARTICULARS."

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE BOAT PEOPLE BY THE VEN. THICH NHAT HANH, ASSISTED BY DR. CAO NGOC PHUONG, WAS SUCH THAT THE BOARD OF THE PROJECT TERMINATED HIS POSITION AS DIRECTOR WHEN HIS VISA TO STAY IN SINGAPORE EXPIRED ON FEBRUARY 18, 1977. UNDER HIS DIRECTION, THE PROJECT SERIOUSLY WENT OFF THE TRACK. BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH THE PROJECT HAVE INQUIRED ABOUT WHAT WENT WRONG, THE FOLLOWING MINIMUM STATEMENT OF PARTICULARS MIGHT BE USEFUL.

1) THE DIRECTOR DEPARTED RADICALLY FROM THE GUIDELINES SET DOWN IN THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON RELIGION AND PEACE (WCRP) AND THE ASIAN CONFERENCE ON RELIGIONANDPEACE (ACRP) ESTABLISHING THE PROJECT.

2) THE DIRECTOR DID NOT REPORT HIS ACTIVITIES REGULARLY TO THE BOARD OF THE PROJECT --NOT EVEN TO THOSE MEMBERS LIVING IN SINGAPORE; HE DID NOT TAKE THEM INTO HIS CONFIDENCE WHEN HIS TACTICS/STRATEGY CONTINUED UNDER CHANGING

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CONDITIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT TO TAKE A LARGE SHIP OF BOAT PEOPLE TO AUSTRALIA WOULD GENERATE MAJOR OPPOSITION BY THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES (UNHCR), THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS, HE INFLEXIBLY PURSUED THIS GOAL, IN THE END BEHIND THE BACK OF THE WHOLE BOARD. ADDITIONALLY, HE WAS NOT CANDID WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF WCRP, BOTH OF WHOM CAME TO SINGAPORE AT DIFFERENT TIMES AT HIS REQUEST.

3) THE DIRECTOR WAS INTENT, AT ANY COST AND WITH UNDUE HASTE, TO BRING AT LEAST ONE WCRP-CHARTERED SHIP WITH REFUGEES FROM THE FORMER INDOCHINA TO AUSTRALIA:
-- SINCE HE COULD NOT QUICKLY FIND BOAT PEOPLE IN DISTRESS ON THE HIGH SEAS TO PUT ON THE WCRP SHIP, HE ORDERED THEM TO BE PICKED UP IN BOAT PEOPLE CAMPS.
-- SINCE A SUITABLE SHIP COULD NOT BE CHARTERED QUICKLY, HE FOUND AN UNSUITABLE SHIP AND MODIFIED IT, WITH NO EXPENSES SPARED (AND OFTEN USING SOME FUNDS CONTROLLED BY HIM OUTSIDE THE WCRP/ACRP BUDGET). THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS WERE UNWISELY COMMITTED; IN ONE CASE, A SMALL SHIP TOOK ON \$50,000 WORTH OF FUEL -- ALMOST SUFFICIENT TO SAIL IT TO HAWAII. (THERE WAS, HOWEVER, NO FRAUD OR MISAPPROPRIATION OF FUNDS.)
-- WHILE THE DIRECTOR TRIED TO PROVIDE FOR MINIMUM SAFETY OF THE 556 REFUGEES ON THE TWO WCRP SHIPS, HE DID TAKE UNNECESSARY RISKS WITH THE LIVES ESPECIALLY OF THE MANY YOUNG CHILDREN AND ELDERLY PEOPLE INVOLVED. HE SEEMED TO CARE MORE FOR THE SURPRISE OF GOING TO AUSTRALIA THAN FOR THE SAFETY OF THE INDIVIDUALS ABOARD SHIP.

4) THE DIRECTOR IN HIS HASTE WAS DUPED BY A CONTACT IN THAILAND CHOSEN BY HIM. THIS PERSON, UNKNOWN TO THE DIRECTOR, SOLD "PLACES" ON ONE OF THE WCRP SHIPS FOR HUGE SUMS TO REFUGEES. MOREOVER, MOST WERE NEVER BOAT PEOPLE.

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5) AS A RESULT OF THE ABOVE ACTIONS OF THE DIRECTOR, THE PROJECT WAS SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY THE UNHCR AND REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY OF THE NINE WESTERN GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING AUSTRALIA, WHICH ARE GIVING PERMANENT HOMES TO BOAT PEOPLE. THE PROJECT UNDER THE DIRECTOR'S ADMINISTRATION SERIOUSLY INTERFERED WITH THE PROCESS, HOWEVER SLOW, SET UP BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO RESETTLE BOAT PEOPLE BOTH TEMPORARILY AND PERMANENTLY. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A DISTINCT ROLE TO PRODUCE GOVERNMENTS AND INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES, BUT IN THE END IT IS GOVERNMENTS WHICH GRANT VISAS TO REFUGEES; "PEOPLES" (SIC) CANNOT DO SO.

6) THE DIRECTOR THUS PUT INTO QUESTION, NEEDLESSLY, THE BONA FIDE AND REPUTATION OF WCRP/ACRP. HOLDRIDGE UNQUOTE. VANCE

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Message Attributes

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